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FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Voracity of Albatrosses.—In 1851 I went on a voyage in an Arctic whaling ship, the *Uncas*. When about sixty miles south of the Cape of Good Hope, we killed a large male sperm whale, tho he took down one of the boats which attacked him before he finally succumbed. A violent gale prevented us from saving all the oil from the whale, before about a week had passed, during which many wandering albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*) and other sea birds feasted on the carcass which was along side of the ship. The screams of the albatrosses could be heard above the roar of the waves and the piping of the wind in the ship's rigging. The albatrosses were ravenous, astonishingly so. The ship's cook took about a dozen pieces of blubber that would weigh from three to four pounds each, tied a stout string about three feet long to each, then knotted the free ends together and cast them among the albatrosses which were within a few feet of the ship. In a twinkling every piece of blubber was swallowed by a different bird, which upon realizing its predicament would start to fly and turn a somersault, or set its wings deep into the water and back away from the piece of blubber it had swallowed. Their throats are capable of great expansion, tho probably somewhat less so than that of the constrictors.

After the cook had repeated this performance several times he varied the entertainment by substituting about half a dozen pieces of rough triangular firewood for the blubber. These were as bulky as the blubber and as readily swallowed, and then disgorged again.—LYMAN BELDING, *Stockton, Cal.*

Sterna paradisæa in Southern California.—While rowing about the tide-water flats back of Terminal Island, near San Pedro, Cal., with Mr. Geo. S. Chambliss, Sept. 13, 1902, looking after migrants, we saw a flock of about twenty-five terns resting on a mud flat. They flew up as we approached and Mr. Chambliss shot one from the edge of the flock, when they all circled about with loud cries, being joined by a number of California gulls (*Larus californicus*). Another specimen was taken. Upon examination they proved to be the Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisæa*). On the return to the landing the same flock was again seen and an immature specimen secured. So far as I can learn the only other record of *Sterna paradisæa* from California is that noted in Grinnell's *Check-List of California Birds*, from Monterey.—FRANK S. DAGGETT, *Pasadena, Cal.*

The Number of Feathers in a Bird Skin.—Last summer I put in spare time in making a count of the feathers on a gull and a sparrow. As there is no prospect of being able to continue the same on other species I will give the record here. These are not estimates, but actual counts feather by feather.

Ammodramus sandwichensis. Body including tail feathers, 762; legs, 78; head and neck, 710; wings, 349; total, 1899.

Larus glaucescens. Head, 2620; neck, 803; back and interscapulars, 570; breast and flanks, 880; wings, 721 + 748; legs and tail, 202; total, 6544. —RICHARD C. MCGREGOR, *Manila, P. I.*

Do Wild Birds Die Instantly?—Mr. Wm. Earl Dodge Scott, in an article on birds in *The Outlook* of July 5, 1902, has made a statement that is somewhat remarkable in that it shows how differently Nature reveals herself to different observers, and especially remarkable because so emphatically backed up by his reference to hunters and others whose occupations teach them to observe. He states that not only do birds die instantly—which term must be here used in a comparative sense, and is a little strong—when injured or afflicted with illness, but also that, in all his experience he has never come across a sick bird or animal in a wild state, nor met any one else who has done so. My attention was attracted by this statement, because, although Mr. Scott probably has had much greater opportunities for observation than I, my experience has been very different from his. This may perhaps be accounted for by the mildness of climate or a lower proportion of bird enemies in the Pacific Coast collecting grounds, but it is a fact that occasionally sick or suffering birds and animals are to be found in California. For example, I have found dead seabirds along the shore, with no signs of their having been injured, in a greatly emaciated condition showing that they had suffered for some time before death. I have shot land birds that were wofully thin and weak, and have even taken one or two that were so afflicted with some cutaneous disease that it seemed advisable not to handle them. The California Jack rabbit suffers to a great extent from lumps caused by a parasite, and these are sometimes so large and weaken the animal to such a degree that it can hardly get out of one's way.

Besides eye witnesses who can verify some of these observations of my own there must be others who have had similar experiences, and consequently Mr. Scott's statement can not be accepted as an absolute rule.—JOSEPH MAILLIARD.

[My own experience agrees perfectly with that of Mr. Mailliard. During December, 1900, while at Monterey Bay I saw a Heermann Gull and many emaciated Brandt Cormorants which were dying a slow death, and only yesterday (Dec. 22, 1902) saw another during a short walk near the Point Pinos Light. On Laysan Island, Hawaiian Group, I saw a number of sickly birds among the seafowl, and found a very rare petrel in this condition. Mr. Scott's rule does not obtain among mammals for beside the example offered by Mr. Mailliard, I found a large sea lion near Cypress Point which existed for days in a perfectly helpless and moribund condition until Professor Harold Heath and myself mercifully killed it. Dissection showed no internal injuries nor parasites, while the teeth rather pointed to old age.—W. K. F.]

The Fall Migration of *Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*.—The fall migration of the mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*) appears to be influenced but little by the food supply or temperature in its summer habitat in the Sierras which it appears to leave because the proper time has arrived for its annual tramp down the west slope. The first flocks start about the first of September, or sometimes two or three days sooner. At Webber Lake after three cold cloudy days, they began to move westward August 28, 1900. When they are migrating their whistle is frequently heard, and they do not seek cover for protection but follow a wagon road, railroad, travel in snow sheds, pass near dwellings, and seem to care but little for self preservation.

Several flocks used to come down to the foot of Stanfield Hill, Yuba County, which for eight years was my favorite shooting grounds, and there spend the winter. They would arrive about the middle of October. One year they did not come at all, and I wondered if they could foretell the mildness or severity of the coming winter, for that winter was a mild one, excepting that October was unusually cold and stormy. Their regularity in leaving the mountains without regard to food, temperature, or size of young has mystified me quite as much as *Anthus pensilvanicus*, and other northern breeding birds which I found in southern Lower California. Why they should remain in the tropical climate of Cape San Lucas until the first of May and then depart for their northern breeding grounds at the same time when they start north from the much more northern Central California puzzled me, for there was no perceptible change in climatic conditions about the first of May, and indeed scarcely a change in them, at the Cape, during the two or three preceeding months.—LYMAN BELDING, *Stockton, Cal.*

Do Quail, *Lophortyx californicus vallicolus*, Remove Their Eggs?—One evening last spring as men were mowing the meadow, I went out to look for quail nests. In all I located eight nests, containing from three to eleven eggs. The following morning I revisited the nests and was surprised to find that four were empty.

Passing outside the field I flushed a quail from a nest containing six eggs which I recognized as a clutch (then of five) I had seen in the field the previous day. I am positive these were the same eggs as I could not mistake the peculiar marking of two of them. This second nest was forty feet from the other and on slightly higher ground. Is this characteristic of the birds? If so, how do they remove the eggs?—ERNEST ADAMS, *Clipper Gap, Cal.*

Frozen Toes.—I shot a golden-crowned sparrow the other day near Palo Alto that shows a curious mutilation of the feet. The outer toe of each foot is thickened and gnarled so that the joints can hardly be distinguished. A stump of the bone or claw protrudes at the tip. The whole thing reminded me of the way chickens' toes look after being frost-bitten. The sparrow, as shown by the skull, was of a last years' brood, and might have tarried in its northern home last fall until a hard freeze set in. I have seen similar scars on bird's feet before, but I can't just now remember what species. Perhaps someone can suggest a more reasonable explanation.—JOSEPH GRINNELL.

Food of Anna Hummingbird.—In December, 1901, I collected a female Anna hummingbird which had eaten thirty-two green tree-hoppers, one spider, one fly, apparently a Simulium, and other insect remains which could not be determined.—F. C. CLARK, *Napa, Cal.*

Wood Ibis in Southern California.—The wood ibis (*Tantalus loculator*) is so rarely noted in Southern California that a flock of twenty-five seen by Joseph Grinnell and myself from the train, on the margin of a tide flat one-half mile north of Oceanside, August 5, is of especial interest. This is the first time we have seen it on this coast and the records of other observers are few and far between. On August 15, Mr. G. H. Coffin shot one from a pair at Bixby, Los Angeles Co., but not knowing of its rarity it found its way into the pot and proved "not very good eating." I was able to identify it by its head and wings.

On August 23, Mr. Coffin and T. L. Duque went out purposely for the other one and were fortunately able to secure it. Through their kindness it reached me in good condition. It

proved to be a female in well worn plumage; crop filled with fragments of aquatic insects.—FRANK S. DAGGETT, *Pasadena, Cal.*

A Rare Land Bird Taken at Sea.—November 13, 1901, while on *U. S. S. Pathfinder*, making the run from Nagasaki to Manila, I killed a female specimen of *Calliope kamtschatkensis* (Gm.) which had come aboard and was resting in the rigging. The position of ship at the time of capture was 127 degrees, 20 minutes E., 29 degrees, 40 minutes north. The bird was not very fat and not storm driven, as we had experienced only mild weather since leaving port. It was in all probability on its fall migration. The species occurs as a rare winter visitant to the Philippines, Grant having recorded several specimens from northern Luzon and Worcester having killed a single specimen in Mashate.—RICHARD MCGREGOR, *Manila, P. I.*

Cryptoglaux acadica acadica in Placer County.—February 7, 1902, while collecting near Bear River, I observed a small owl, apparently asleep, sitting on a fallen log. I had watched him for several minutes when with surprising quickness he flew from the log to a brush pile eight feet distant. Fearing I might lose him, I shot just as he alighted. He proved to be a saw-whet owl, and lying near him was a mouse still struggling. Evidently Mr. Owl was sleeping with one eye open. This is the only specimen I have met with in this county.

Pigmy owls (*Glaucidium g. californicum*) are occasionally seen here. I shot one on March 24th just at dusk. It flew from a cypress where a member of linnets were going to roost. ERNEST ADAMS, *Clipper Gap, Cal.*

Late Nesting of Arkansas Goldfinch.—On November 22, 1900, I found the nest of an Arkansas goldfinch among the leafless branches of a boxelder. At first glance I thought it was a nest of the previous summer but closer examination showed the tail of the sitting bird sticking over the edge. The nest contained a clutch of four fresh eggs. Being interested in a case of such unusual nesting I kept close watch of the little domicile. All went well for a week when several days of hard rains wrecked the nest. I noticed no further attempt on the part of the parent birds to resume their late housekeeping.—JOHN M. MILLER, *Parlier, Cal.*

The Snowflake and Other Unusual Birds at Marysville.—In the winter of 1872 or 1873, at Marysville, during the memorable snowstorm, when snow was six inches deep, a flock of forty or fifty snowflakes (*Passerina nivalis*) stayed fearlessly two or three days on the steamboat landing at the foot of D street, and caused much comment. They were mentioned in the local column of the *Appeal* by someone who gave their latin name. I have not heretofore mentioned their occurrence because I did not get a specimen, and was not positive of the form or species. Although nearly the same list of species can be found in Central California every winter, that was a notable exception. At the same locality in the comparatively cold winter of 1877-78 the northern shrike (*Lanius borealis*) was quite common. I have not seen it at any other time in this state. Fine examples of the so-called hybrid flicker were very common there that winter, and their presence was apparently due to cold weather, for I have scarcely seen one like them since that time. I sent a large fine series to the Smithsonian where, Mr. Ridgway told me, as I remember, they were mounted and placed on exhibition.

The resident species remained and included the mockingbird, Pacific yellow-throat, Lawrence goldfinch, Parkman wren, and many other species. I doubt if the residents had a particle of the migratory instinct. Perhaps they never had any. During snowstorms at Murphys I have been unable to ascertain that the storms drove the residents away from the locality. I once saw a fine male Anna hummingbird feeding in manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*) on the mountain side above Murphys when the ground was covered with snow. Snowstorms seldom occur in the valleys or foothills, and any snow that falls is certain to melt in a day or less.—LYMAN BELDING, *Stockton, Cal.*

Peculiar Habits of a Black Phoebe.—For six years or more, I am told, a phoebe (*Sayornis n. semiatra*) has lived alone at this place and roosted, summer and winter on a branch of a rosebush under a porch. This year from January to June it could be found any night on its perch and seemed no wise disturbed by my frequent visits. In June the rosebush was torn down and for three weeks I could find no trace of the bird. Then it reappeared, alone, and ever since has divided its time between the house and barn. Why has it remained so long unmated? In former years they nested here regularly but the nearest nest this summer was over a mile from here.—ERNEST ADAMS, *Clipper Gap, Cal.*

Destruction of Birds' Eggs: A Query.—I have been greatly puzzled at the wholesale destruction of birds' eggs here, and vigilant watch during the nesting period failed to find the culprits. Early in the season I found shells of three black-headed grosbeak's eggs in a road, at least three yards from any suitable nesting place. The contents of the eggs had been removed through irregular holes about three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter. A few days later eggs of

other birds were found mutilated in this way.

It was my desire to rear a number of nestlings for a small aviary, but of the scores of nests I had to select from, less than a dozen remained undisturbed until the young were hatched. Only nests in and about the orchard were molested, and here I have examined over a hundred shells; a few were broken but most of them had a small jagged hole in the side. Jays and shrikes never venture about the house. A bird must do the work; or if not, what? ERNEST ADAMS, *Clipper Gap, Cal.*

Mossy Murres.—During the summer one often finds on Monterey Bay solitary murres (*Uria californica*) which have not been able to join the hordes of their kind at the regular breeding grounds on the Farallone Islands or elsewhere. Specimens obtained often proved to be remarkably emaciated and so weak as to be unable to fly. Perhaps a failure to properly preen themselves accounts for a greenish or brownish green accretion which forms a zone across the breast and along the sides of the body just at and a little below the water-line. One bird in particular which washed ashore near the Hopkins Laboratory last year had a broad oil green band across the breast. Microscopic examination showed the feathers of this region to be closely covered by attached masses of diatoms. I sent some of these feathers to Dr. George C. Whipple of New York, who identified the prevailing species of diatom as *Fragilaria pacifica* Grum., with some *Meridion circulare*, both of which are figured in Wolle's "Diatomaceæ of North America." The same or similar plants may be found on any floating body such as driftwood, or on piling. The birds with this conspicuous discoloration across the white under surface are sometimes unable to leave the water, the feathers having soaked through, and the whole bird become almost water-logged. These individuals may have become decrepit from old age, or accidentally disabled in some way.—JOSEPH GRINNELL.

The Hummingbirds of Escondido and Vicinity.—Of all the hummingbirds of this locality the black-chinned (*alexandri*) is by far the most common. The first year I collected here the hummers were very common. A small citrus nursery not far from one place seemed to abound with them, nearly all being of the black-chinned variety. Here they build their nests in the young trees, using willow, cotton, and the down from the young sycamore leaves for material. It would be hard to tell how many nests were built and occupied, but at least twenty or more were found containing eggs and young. But where have they gone?

In 1900 there was hardly a nest built in this nursery. My notes show that I observed but two nests of this species during that season, the first one being found May 2, containing one fresh egg, which I supposed hatched with the second egg in time. Two nice sets of Anna hummers were preserved during that season, being taken in May. The composition of the nests was quite different from that of the black-chinned, consisting of withered leaves and feathers, all being covered with the usual amount of spider web. These were placed in oaks well up on the hill side.

I found but four nests of the black-chinned and one of the Anna. I have failed to find this family of birds breeding here as early as recorded further north, my earliest record being that of the Anna just mentioned which was found on March 17, containing two young about one-half grown. I have noticed but one specimen of the rufous hummer here. It was a male late in the summer of 1900, so I have no reason to believe they breed here. To sum up I have recorded two species breeding, black-chinned and Anna together with one probably migratory, namely, the rufous. The Allen variety is found breeding about twenty miles further inland in the pine belt, a friend of mine having found a nest containing two eggs which he collected with one of the parent birds.—NELSON CARPENTER, *Escondido, Cal.*

Confirmation of a Record.—In my Sur River article in the last CONDOR (Vol. IV, p. 125), doubt was expressed as to the proper identity of certain species previously attributed to the region in a published paper by Milton S. Ray. In the case of "*Ammodramus savannarum perpallidus*" (= *Ammodramus savannarum bimaculatus*) Mr. Ray has submitted for re-identification the specimen which he secured, thus substantiating his record. A seacoast breeding station for this species seems exceptional.—J. GRINNELL.

Further Notes on the Pine Siskin —On September 2, I found two nests of *Spinus pinus* containing newly hatched young. As with the majority of birds in this country, it would be difficult to call these second or third sets, as nesting seems to be a continuous performance, and indulged in at any time during the season that a pair of birds happen to feel like it.—J. H. BOWLES, *Tacoma, Wash.*

Query.—Can any of the readers of THE CONDOR give me any information as to best places to go on the Alaskan coast for the purpose of photographing colonies of seabirds?—E. R. WARREN, *Colorado Springs, Col.*